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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 004103

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SUBJECT: IRAQI CIVIL SOCIETY ACTIVIST DISCUSSES SOURCES OF VIOLENCE

Classified By: Political Counselor Margaret Scobey for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

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¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In a recent meeting, ex-Transitional National Assembly (TNA) member and civil society activist Dr. Amal Kashif Al-Ghita expressed concern that neither GOI nor USG policy is truly addressing what she see as the sources of the violence in Iraq. She lamented that the tolerance her grandfather, Ayatollah Sheikh Mohammad Hussein Kashif Al-Ghita, the senior cleric (marja) in Najaf in the 1930s, had been destroyed by "dirty sectarian politics." She recently toured Iraq and came away convinced that unemployment, poor housing and poor education are exacerbating terrorism. END SUMMARY.

&Educational Poverty8

¶2. (C) Al-Ghita said that she had seen widespread educational poverty, even in areas where people were not suffering from financial poverty. She said at the Iraq-Iran border, some children must walk up to five kilometers each way to attend school. Many families in this area are financially well-off, she claimed, largely owing to smuggling activities across the border. However, with poor access to education, children were growing up with few alternatives and little exposure to anything but criminal activities. Their activities were providing weapons to terrorists and introducing uneducated and inexperienced young adults to dangerous people and ideologies.

¶3. (C) Al-Ghita said that she had addressed her concerns to Minister of Education Khudair Al-Khuzaie upon her return to Baghdad. Al-Khuzaie told her that there was no money in the budget to build and operate more schools (NOTE: IRMO estimates that up to 93% of the MOE's budget is consumed by salaries. END NOTE). Al-Ghita suggested using local construction methods, specifically constructing the buildings from locally available reedy plants. Al-Khuzaie refused to consider the idea, telling Al-Ghita he preferred instead to focus on building fewer but more modern institutions.

Housing and Violence

¶4. (C) During her tour, Al-Ghita also spent time in Sadr City, where she noted that a significant housing problem that she believes contributes to increased violence. Although she admitted that the problem had been exacerbated by internal displacement caused by this year's increase in sectarian violence, she noted that it had begun long ago during the economic sanctions following the first Gulf War. As families have grown and extended relatives are unable to afford

alternative housing, households have steadily expanded. Al-Ghita said that she had personally seen households containing as many as 25 people living in 1-2 room accommodations. Such close quarters had raised a generation full of anger and frustration, and "no one should be surprised that 15 and 16 year olds are now planting IEDs," she said.

¶15. (C) Al-Ghita called for more low-income housing units to be built, preferably further from urban centers. She predicted that reducing the population density in cities would have an overall positive impact on both health and quality of life, and would help to spread wealth and economic development to more Iraqis. She claimed that existing government housing programs are corrupt, and that housing was only allocated for friends and relatives of officials, or those with connections. (NOTE: Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih and the Minister of Housing and Construction Bayan Dizayee are leading a project to provide \$500 million in FY07 funding for low cost housing throughout the country. In theory, participant selection for the project will be based on a point system. END NOTE). She noted that Baghdad University had done studies on cost-effective building strategies for low-income housing, and offered to obtain copies of their report.

Unemployment

¶16. (C) Al-Ghita lamented that unemployment is crippling the economy, contributing to a sharp increase in domestic violence, and forcing men to turn to militias and other criminal gangs for "employment and salary." Creation of "satellite cities" would help to provide jobs, jump-start

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development efforts and decrease the "level of tension that had developed between the Iraqi people," she claimed.

¶16. (C) In addition to officials previously noted, Al-Ghita discussed her findings with DPM Barham Salih upon her return. He suggested that she organize a conference on violence in Iraq for political leaders and subject matter experts. Al-Ghita said that she supported the idea of bringing these groups together, noting that solutions to such basic problems were not logistically difficult, but rather a matter of political will. However she reportedly told DPM Salih that she would not participate in such a conference unless he could guarantee that the resulting recommendations would be implemented.

Bio Notes

¶17. (C) Al-Ghita comes from a prominent and well respected Shia family. She claims that her family has been in Iraq for more than 1400 years, and that with six marja including her grandfather who was the Grand Ayatollah in the family, they have contributed more to the clerical establishment in Iraq than any other family. She was a member of the Transitional National Assembly (TNA) as a Shia Independent on the Eitilaf list. She ran for a seat in the Council of Representatives as a member of Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress party, but was unsuccessful. She still supports Chalabi, but is unsure whether or not she will run in provincial elections.

KHALILZAD